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ABSTRACT

This bibliography presents annotations of 38 journal articles, books, encyclopedia and handbook entries, and scholarly papers that discuss the role of grammar in the writing curriculum. Entries are organized under the following headings: selected overviews and position papers; research reviews; selected experimental research; grammar instruction in English as a Second Language; and historical perspectives. Materials in the annotated bibliography were published between 1927 and 1995. (RS)

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The Role of Traditional Grammar Instruction in the Teaching of Writing:

A Selected, Annotated Bibliography

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The Role of Traditional Grammar Instruction in the Teaching of Writing:

A Selected, Annotated Bibliography

This bibliography was distributed at a panel, "Grammar: How to Teach It/Whether to Teach It," at the meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Washington, DC, March, 1995. It is designed to offer a brief overview and background on the issue, whether to teach grammar.

Limitations

This bibliography is a selected listing, limited to scholarly discussion of the role of grammar in the writing curriculum. It does not treat the question of how to teach grammar (for representative anthologies, see Hunter & Wallace, 1995, p. 3 below, and Rutherford & Smith, 1988, p. 6 below, for first- and second-language discussions).

Scope

Entries are organized under the following headings: 1. Selected overviews and position papers (pp. 3-5), 2. Research reviews (p. 5), 3. Selected experimental research (pp. 6-7), 4. Grammar instruction in ESL--representative positions (pp. 7-8), 5. Historical perspectives (pp. 8-9). Of course, the scope of this bibliography is limited because the controversy about grammar instruction continues and because second language studies continue to provide insights into grammar. It is of interest, nevertheless, that in College English in 1985, Joseph Williams confidently asserting that "the grammar issue is now closed," based on the research of Hartwell (1985) and Hillocks (1984).

1. Selected overviews and position papers

Davis, F. (1984). In defense of grammar. English Education, 16, 151-164.
Argues for the teaching of traditional grammar in secondary schools; appends (pp. 165-166) a letter from Noam Chomsky endorsing traditional grammar teaching to develop curiosity about language.

D'Eloia, S. (1977). The uses--and limits--of grammar. Journal of Basic Writing, 3(1), 1-48.
[Repr. (1987). In T. Enos (Ed.), A sourcebook for basic writing teachers (pp. 373-416). New York: Random House.]
Argues for the need for focused grammar instruction for college basic writing students, and sketches a sample lesson on the verb phrase.

Elgin, S. H. (1982). The great grammar myth (Occasional Paper No. 5). Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, Bay Area Writing Project. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 251 843) [24 pages]
Notes the long-standing cultural mythology of grammar teaching, and sketches an informal experiment finding active involvement with language superior to direct grammar instruction.

Francis, W. N. (1954). Revolution in grammar. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 40, 299-312.
Discriminates among various meanings of "grammar," suggesting that traditional grammar study has no effect on students' internal grammars, but noting the value, for teachers, of American structuralist grammar.

Hartwell, P. (1985). Grammar, grammars, and the teaching of grammar. College English, 47, 105-127.
[Repr. (1987). In T. Enos (Ed.), A sourcebook for basic writing teachers (pp. 348-372). New York: Random House.]
[Repr. (1990). In R. Graves (Ed.), Rhetoric and composition: A sourcebook for teachers (3rd ed., pp. 163-185). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.]
Argues against the utility of formal grammar instruction, based on a theory of language. (See also responses, in subsequent issues of College English, by J. Williams, R. D. Cureton, C. Moses, E. A. Vavra, M. Kolln, & T. N. Huckin.)

Hartwell, P. (1994). Grammar and writing. In A. C. Purves (Ed.), Encyclopedia of English studies and language arts (pp. 539-541). New York: Scholastic.

Draws on four lines of inquiry--error analysis, studies of metalinguistic awareness, experimental studies, and language theory--to argue that "grammar instruction does little good (and, potentially, much harm) in supporting literacy development" (p. 541).

Hillocks, G., Jr., & Smith, M. (1991). Grammar and usage. In J. Flood, J. M. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J. R. Squire (Eds.), Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts (pp. 591-603). New York: Macmillan.

Surveys grammar, usage, and sentence-combining research, concluding that grammar instruction "should not be treated as a course of study to improve the quality of writing" (p. 600).

Hunter, S., & Wallace, R. (Eds.). (1995). The place of grammar in writing instruction: Past, present, future. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Offers essays basically on how to teach grammar, not whether to teach it.

Kolln, M. (1981). Closing the books on alchemy. College Composition and Communication, 32, 139-151.

Places grammar instruction at the center of the writing curriculum, labeling as "alchemists" those who hold other positions.

McCleary, B. (1995). Grammar making a comeback in composition teaching. Composition Chronicle, Newsletter for Writing Teachers, 8(6), 1-4.

Introduces a series of articles and reviews on the teaching of "simpler, more accurate grammars [that] show promise for improved teaching of correctness and style."

Neuleib, J., & Brosnahan, I. (1987). Teaching grammar to writers. Journal of Basic Writing, 6(1), 28-35.

Argues against the dismissal of grammar teaching, citing research studies which illustrate how grammar instruction improves writing skills.

Straw, S. B. (1994). Grammar, teaching of. In A. C. Purves (Ed.), Encyclopedia of English studies and language arts (pp. 534-539). New York: Scholastic.

Supports research findings about the lack of value of formal grammar instruction in improving writing, but argues for the value of stylistic grammar, as taught, for example,

through guided sentence combining.

2. Research reviews

Braddock, R., Lloyd-Jones, R., & Schoer, L. (1963). Research in written composition. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Reviews research in writing instruction to 1960, concluding: "The teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the teaching of writing" (pp. 37-38).

Hillocks, G., Jr. (1984). What works in teaching composition: A meta-analysis of experimental research studies. American Journal of Education, 93, 133-170.
[Repr. (1986). In N. L. Stein (Ed.), Literacy in American schools: Learning to read and write (pp. 133-170). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.]

Analyzes experimental research, 1960-1982, finding that grammar instruction led to a statistically significant decline in student writing ability, the only instructional method, of those examined, not to produce gains in writing quality.

Hillocks, G., Jr. (1986). Research on written composition: New directions for teaching. Urbana, IL: ERIC/RCS & NCRE.

An expanded report of the preceding entry.

Neuleib, J. (1981). The relation of formal grammar to composition. College Composition and Communication, 23, 247-250.

Finds the relationship of grammar to composition "not proven," calling for further research while maintaining the utility of formal grammar instruction.

Tomlinson, D. (1994). Errors in the research into the effectiveness of grammar teaching. English in Education, 28(1), 20-26.

Criticizes two research studies, asking whether the sustained instruction in the "basics" of English, especially grammar, is being unrightfully ignored.

3. Selected experimental research

Clifford, J. (1981). Composing in stages: The effects of a collaborative pedagogy. Research in the Teaching of English, 15, 37-53.

Finds that a collaborative pedagogy produced significantly better gains than a traditional pedagogy with college basic writers over one semester. Incidentally notes that there were no significant differences in knowledge of grammar between the two groups, even though the traditional group received regular grammar instruction.

Elley, W. B., Barham, I. H., Lamb, H., & Wyllie, M. (1976). The role of grammar in a secondary school English curriculum. Research in the Teaching of English, 10, 5-21.

Reports a three-year experiment in New Zealand, testing the effects of traditional grammar instruction, transformational grammar instruction, and no grammar instruction on the writing quality and surface correctness of high school students. Concludes that grammar instruction offers no benefits for student writing.

Elley, W. B., Barham, I. H., Lamb, H., & Wyllie, M. (1979). The role of grammar in a secondary school English curriculum. Wellington: New Zealand Council of Teachers of English.

An expanded report of the preceding entry.

Holden, M. (1994). Effectiveness of two approaches to teaching writing in improving students' knowledge of English grammar. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 366 006) [16 pages]

Reports an informal study, comparing the effect of formal grammar instruction with a modified process approach in two sections of freshman English. Finds students taught by a process approach improved knowledge of grammar more than those taught by direct instruction.

O'Hare, F. (1973). Sentence combining: Improving student writing without formal grammar instruction (NCTE Research Report No. 15). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Reports an experiment with high school students, achieving the syntactic gains of earlier sentence-combining experiments without a formal grammar component.

Spilton, R. (1986). The effects of individualized language arts, sentence-combining, and traditional grammar on the syntactic maturity and quality of writing of a select group of eighth graders (Doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University, College of Education, 1986). Dissertation Abstracts International, 47, 4007A. (University Microfilms No. AAC8703964) [244 pages]

Tests the effects of three methods--Individualized Language Arts, sentence combining, and traditional grammar--on the holistic ratings and syntactic measures of the writing of students at grade eight. Finds no effect of method on holistic score, but, in general, positive effect on syntactic measures for the sentence-combining group.

4. Grammar instruction in ESL--representative positions

Celce-Murcia, M. (1991). Grammar pedagogy in second and foreign language teaching. TESOL Quarterly, 25, 459-512.

Reviews methodological trends of the past 25 years, and proposes a decision-making strategy for resolving the controversy regarding how much grammar one should teach to language learners.

Celce-Murcia, M. (1992). Formal grammar instruction: An educator comments. TESOL Quarterly, 26, 406-409

Argues that grammar instruction remains an integral aspect of communicative methodology. (See also Krashen, 1992, below.)

Dirven, R. (1990). Pedagogical grammar [State of the Art]. Language Teaching, 23, 1-18.

Review article, treating the opposition to formal grammar teaching (as in Krashen 1982, for example) as a pendulum swing, with the pendulum now swinging back--as "a new 'grammar boom'" (p. 4).

Garrett, N. (1986). The problem with grammar: What kind can the language learner use? Modern Language Journal, 70, 133-147.

Discusses the relationship between grammar competence and communicative competence, noting pedagogical problems inherent in traditional grammar.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. New York: Pergamon Press.

Sketches a "monitor model" of second language acquisition, a model that highly constrains

the value of formal rules.

Krashen, S. D. (1992). Formal grammar instruction: Another educator comments. TESOL Quarterly, 26, 409-411.

Offers a position, conflicting with that of Celce-Murcia (1992), above, characterizing formal grammar instruction as peripheral to second language development. (See also the response by P. M. Lightbown & M. Pienemann, TESOL Quarterly, 27, 717-722, and response by Krashen, 722-725.)

Rutherford, W., & Smith, M. S. (Eds.). (1988). Grammar and second language teaching: A book of readings. New York: Harper & Row.

A collection of essays on grammar and ESL, concerned essentially with how to teach grammar rather than whether to teach it.

Terrell, T. D. (1991). The role of grammar instruction in a communicative approach. Modern Language Journal, 75, 52-63.

Assigns a very limited role to grammar instruction in assisting second-language acquisition.

5. Historical perspectives

Christie, Frances. (1993). The "received tradition" of English teaching: The decline of rhetoric and the corruption of grammar. In Bill Green (Ed.), The insistence of the letter: Literacy studies and curriculum theorizing (pp. 75-106). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Notes the growth of school grammar in nineteenth-century schools, "which marginalized any serious interest in language" (p. 101).

Connors, R. J. (1986a). Grammar in American college composition: An historical overview. In D. A. McQuade (Ed.), The territory of language: Linguistics, stylistics, and the teaching of composition (pp. 3-22). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Connors, R. J. (1986b). The rhetoric of mechanical correctness. In Thomas Newkirk (Ed.), Only connect: Uniting reading and writing (pp. 27-58). Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Essays examine the academic and historical relationships in America between writing

instruction and grammar, concluding that traditional grammar is still influential despite new findings in linguistics.

Dykema, K. W. (1961). Where our grammar came from. College English, 22, 455-465.
The grammar of the schools comes from medieval Latin grammar, unrelated to actual English use.

Fries, C. C. (1927). The rules of the common school grammars. PMLA, 42, 221-237.
Traces the separate development of "school grammars," distinct from the scientific study of language.

Glau, G. R. (1993). Mirroring ourselves? The pedagogy of early grammar texts. Rhetoric Review, 11, 418-435.
Argues that the use of specific grammar texts, along with the books themselves, has remained essentially unchanged for over 200 years, and notes that they mirror our perceptions of our students.

Woods, W. F. (1985). The cultural tradition of nineteenth-century "traditional" grammar teaching. Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 15, 3-12.
Explores the dominance of traditional grammar in nineteenth-century America, finding that such instruction has less to do with improving writing than with issues of social class and political power.